GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:106
ANSWERED ON:13.07.2004
NCERT BOOKS
Chandrappan Shri C.K.;Satpathy Shri Tathagata

Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

:

(a) whether the Government has constituted a three member committee of eminent historians to review the existing NCERT school history books along with other subjects;

(b) if so, the details thereof along with the terms and conditions of the committee; (

(c) whether the existing history books would be studied by the students for the academic year 2004-05;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) the steps being taken to protect students' future in view of changes in the textbooks?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ARJUN SINGH)

(a) to (e): A statement is laid on the Table of the Sabha.

THE STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN PARTS (a) to (e) OF THE REPLY TO LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 106 BY SHRI C.K. CHANDRAPPAN AND SHRI TATHAGATA SATPATHY REGARDING NCERT BOOKS DUE FOR ANSWER ON 13TH JULY, 2004.

(a) & (e) Yes, Sir. The panel comprises three eminent historians, namely, Prof. S . Settar, currently Dr. S. Radhakrishnan visiting Professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore and formerly the Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research, Prof. J.S. Grewal, former Vice-Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University and former Director of Indian Institute of Advanced Studies at Shimla and Prof. Barun De., an eminent historian of modern India and first Director of the Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute for Asian Studies, Kolkata. The Terms of Reference of the panel were as follows:-

"The issues of communalisation and inadequacies of history textbooks of the NCERT have engaged public and academic attention for a long time. These text-books have been mostly printed for the current year and in a substantial number of schools teaching work has already started, based on these books. It is, therefore, impractical to withdraw these books at this stage and replace them with more appropriate books without causing dislocation in the studies of millions of students. However, the same impracticability should not result in our children learning either communal views or distorted facts of history. Even as the processes are initiated to address the long term remedial measures, including reconstitution of Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) and the initiation of the process of curriculum frame-work review, as a short term measure, it has been considered necessary to do a quick review of these books by a panel of eminent historians of impeccable credentials, to suggest what needs to be done in the short term. If they so recommend, the Government will direct the NCERT and the CBSE to issue appropriate directions to the teachers to transact the curriculum as per those recommendations. In particular, the recommendations should be for removing distorted and communally biased portions and for inclusion of short passages which will fill in the gaps that some of these books are supposed to be having or could develop after the removal of the aforesaid mentioned passages. The three distinguished historians have been requested by the Government to submit their recommendations at the earliest so that the interventions could be made, if necessary, as early as possible, in the academic session that has already started in some schools in the country. Joint Secretary (School Education) in the Ministry of Human Resource Development will provide secretariat and logistics support to this group."

The panel has submitted its report. I regret to inform the House that the complaints made about the errors and biased nature of the books, have been found to be correct by the panel.

Among other things, the report brings out the following:

The textbooks prepared since 2000 are 'so full of errors and sub-standard' that the panel finds it impossible to recommend their continuation. The errors are so many that rectification of each one of them is almost impossible.

It also states that there is a common strand of bias that runs through the entire series. This bias gives more weight to Hindu religious practices and revival movements distinguished from other religious or modernizing traditions that have been, in the last one thousand

years, as much, a part of India's composite culture as the ones of earlier origin.

They, therefore, propose that a list of alternative reading material viz. books prepared by private publishers may be recommended for students of Class VI to X for the current academic year till alternative material prepared, through due process, is prepared by the NCERT in time for the next academic year.

The Panel is aware of the fact that alternative material is unavailable for classes XI and XII at present. The three members have made suggestions that either on the existing books or on reviving the old books, it would be necessary to issue proper advisories to teachers. Whereas, Prof.Barun De has suggested that, the book on 'Modern India' by Bipan Chandra for Class XII should be revived, if necessary, by updating it. Prof.Grewal has similarly suggested that the book on 'Medieval India' by Satish Chandra should be revived with a proper advisory. For the 'Ancient Period', Prof. Settar has suggested further scouting for alternative reading material.

The findings of the Committee have put the Government in a very difficult situation. On the one hand, because the panel has found the books to be of unacceptable quality and content, it is not appropriate to continue with them. On the other, the academic session has begun quite some time back in some schools and it would be unfair to students and teachers to be asked to use different textbooks at this late stage. Making available alternative text throughout the country will also pose serious problems of logistics and cannot be arranged in a satisfactory manner till very late in the academic session. At the moment, the Government is trying to address this serious dilemma which has been caused by the distortion of history books

The recommendations of the panel of historians will be put up for consideration of the Executive Committee (EC) of the NCERT in its meeting on the 14th July, 2004. While taking a decision, the EC will no doubt keep the interest of students as their foremost concern.